

# Trial Court Coordination

## MORE EFFICIENCY

The term “trial court coordination” refers to the sharing of administrative and judicial resources among the municipal and superior courts within a county or with nearby counties for the purpose of increasing the courts’ efficiency. The program was established by the Trial Court Realignment and Efficiency Act of 1991, which contained specific coordination provisions designed to reduce the long-term costs of trial court operations, increase the uniformity of judicial services throughout the state, and improve public access to the courts.

The act required each court to develop a coordination plan to achieve efficiencies through the maximum utilization of court resources. The plans were to con-

sider a number of specific items, including (1) the assignment of any judge to hear any type of case, regardless of jurisdictional or geographical boundaries; (2) the sharing and merging of court support staff within or across county boundaries; and (3) the adoption of unified local rules of court. These original plans were to be submitted to the Judicial Council by March 1, 1992, for approval by July 1, 1992. Subsequent legislation requires biannual submission of countywide plans to the council.

## TIMELINES ADOPTED

On January 25, 1995, the Judicial Council adopted statewide rules and standards to guide the trial courts in coordinating judicial and staff resources between superior and municipal courts. The rules and stan-

### 53 COUNTIES UNIFY, REMAINING 5 CONTINUE COORDINATION EFFORTS

The primary focus of the Trial Court Coordination Advisory Committee (TCCAC) is to assist the Judicial Council in evaluating the coordination efforts of the trial courts. As of April 1999, 53 counties had voted to unify. The TCCAC will continue working with the remaining 5 counties by reviewing their coordination plans for fiscal years 1999–2001 and assessing their coordination progress until they vote to unify. The next coordination plans

for these 5 counties, for fiscal years 1999–2000 and 2000–2001, are due to the Judicial Council by July 1, 1999.

The committee has designed a comprehensive coordination plan and implementation review process, which was approved by the council at its April 29, 1999, meeting. Counties submitting coordination plans for fiscal years 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 are required to indicate how they have achieved the goals and objectives that

must be completed by July 1999.

The committee supports a strong link between trial court coordination and trial court funding, new judge-ships, and the assignment of judges and works with other council advisory committees to recommend incentives for coordination and to assess coordination efforts. The committee also continues to study the impact of new and existing legislation that may facilitate trial court coordination.

dards clarify the legislative mandate of the Trial Court Realignment and Efficiency Act of 1991 and Assembly Bills 2544 and 1084, which took effect in 1994. The rules and standards require trial courts in every county to complete the following by the specified dates:

- Courts must work together in a gradual process over the next five years so that they will completely share resources by July 1, 1999;
- By July 1, 1995, courts were to have created an oversight committee to plan for coordination;
- By July 1, 1996, the activities of judges were to have been coordinated;
- By July 1, 1998, the trial courts were to have adopted uniform local rules for the county; and
- By July 1, 1999, the superior and municipal courts must have a Judicial Council–approved joint oversight structure for court-coordinated activities.

## **ASSESSMENT SCHEDULED**

The Judicial Council has approved a four-phased review procedure consisting of an intensive document review, implementation workshops, self-assessment, and team site visits. This process allows for a comprehensive review of the implementation of council-approved coordination plans. The Legislature has allowed for flexibility in achieving coordination and did not demand that courts adhere to a single set of criteria in measuring coordination achievement. Courts are required to submit progress reports to the Judicial Council listing the specific methods they are using to achieve coordination.

*The Judicial Council of California, chaired by the Chief Justice, is responsible for improving the administration of justice in California. Established by the state Constitution in 1926, the council adopts rules of court and provides policy direction to the courts and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature about court practice, procedure, and administration. The council performs its constitutional and other functions with the support of its staff agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts.*